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## The Museum of Ideas: Fantastic Wilderness Park

Alyssa Goraieb

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The Museum of Ideas:  
Fantastic Wilderness Park

by

Alyssa Goraieb

Advised by Gregory Corso,  
in committee with Julia Czerniak and Janette Kim

Graduate Thesis Preparation Book  
Syracuse University  
School of Architecture

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Precedents

(Site)

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## CONTENTION

The history of wilderness is the history of an idea. A missing element of the natural history museum is the human attitude within which nature is captured and displayed. This project wants to put the historical displays of the museum within a context by making an addition to the natural history museum that archives the historical attitudes, experiences and perceptions towards wilderness.

## BACKGROUND

A current and common social understanding of wilderness can be at least partially attributed to the Wilderness Act of 1964, which determines wilderness as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain”. However, it is now known that there is no such place that is unaffected by human beings in our globalized world – even the most pristine parklands are infiltrated with electromagnetic waves and subject to global warming.

The context of this project aligns with environmental historian William Cronon’s essay “The Trouble with Wilderness”. Wilderness, since the conception of the term, is always in opposition to human settlement and control. Wilderness doesn’t exist because it is a socially constructed idea that creates a dichotomy within nature, separating humans from the places or processes that are outside of control. Wilderness is an idea because it is an anthropogenic attitude towards the world, and as these attitudes have changed throughout history, the perception of wilderness has evolved as a result.

## PROJECT

This project asks for a history of the wilderness idea to manifest itself physically within the city as an extension of the museum. The project will be a museumification of ideas and perceptions, constructing an abstracted lineage of the idea of wilderness.

The human experience of wilderness can be fragmented and arranged under the following categorical banners: Old Roots, Romantic Wilderness, American Wilderness, Myth of the Frontier, Wilderness Preserved, and Wild Wilderness.

Each idea will be reproduced in its own fragment and juxtaposed with the staged scenes of the others. The fragments strung together will create an edited history of the wilderness idea.

### Defining the Ideas

Through an edited reading of environmental history, the attitude and experience of wilderness can be broken down into descriptive words and formal/material characteristics. These will be used to determine values in each fragment of history.

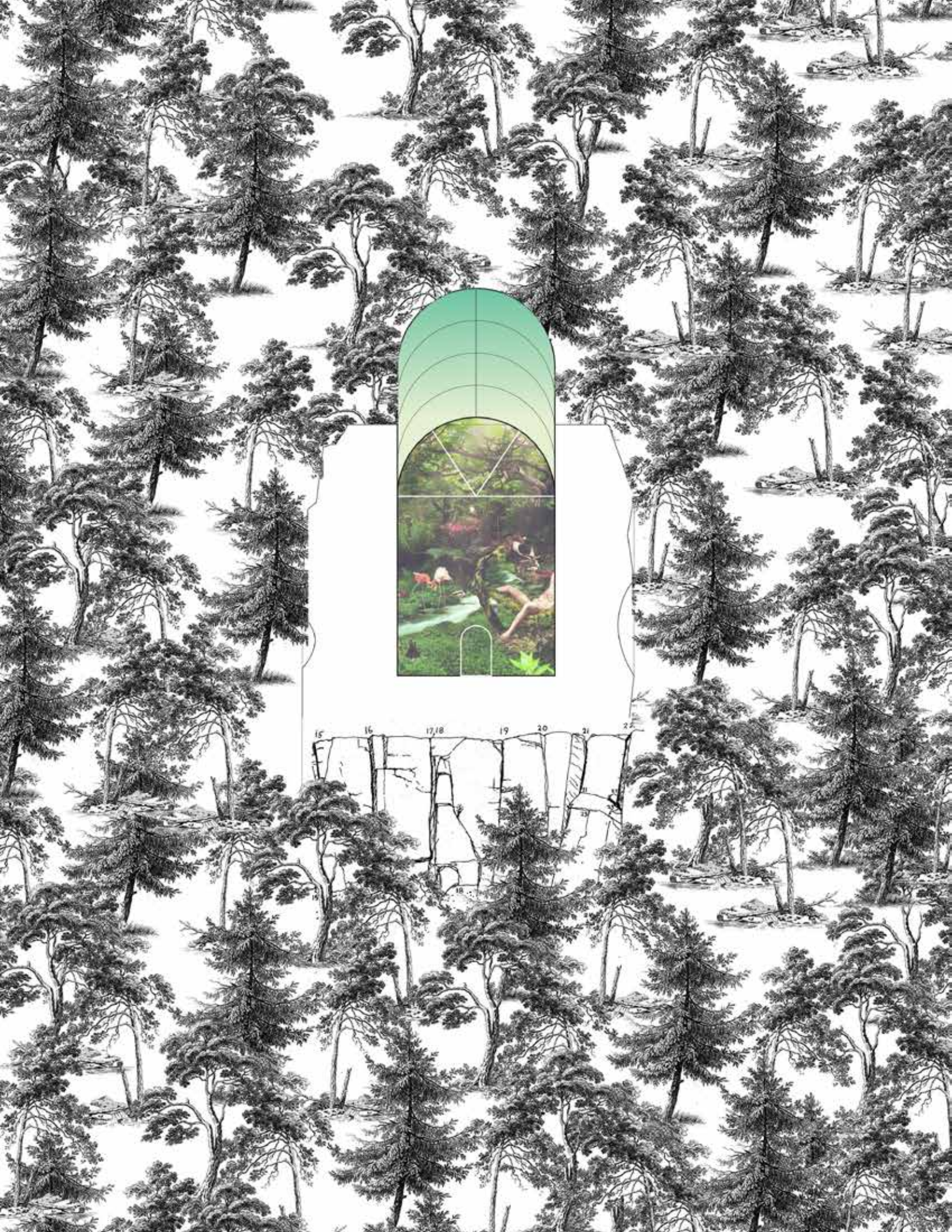
### A Museum Reconstruction

Through an abstraction of the experiential/formal/material characteristics of each idea, a reproduction of each wilderness idea can be designed. Natural history museums typically include fragments of nature within its building which are then systematically organized based on a scientific taxonomy. The fragments are decontextualized, and then recontextualized within the museum setting, juxtaposed with like specimens and decorations. The scenes created in the habitat dioramas are meant to display real moment in time; although in reality, the scene is a composition of pieces from different origins, age, or material composition that tell a story to an audience. Using the museums tools of display; fragmentation, decontextualization, abstraction and juxtaposition, new forms and experiences can emerge in the reproduction.

### Fantastic Wilderness Park

The attitude/experience from each idea scene is further abstracted to include programmatic elements that support the experience characteristics of each idea. The idea scenes should be juxtaposed into a larger whole that creates the Fantastic Wilderness Park.





## OLD ROOTS

The perception towards wilderness in America begins with the attitudes brought by settlers from Europe. This attitude relies primarily on a biblical understanding of wilderness as a savage, barren, and desolate place. Wilderness is inhospitable and dangerous; the residence of the devil and things evil. Wilderness is always in contrast to the settlement. Biblically, the wilderness is in contrast with the Garden of Eden, where the Garden was once for Adam and Eve a worldly paradise, where humans can live naked without shame, living among animals and fruit bearing trees.

### Garden of Eden

characteristics:

pleasure,  
delight,  
paradise,

program:

1. botanical garden
2. resting places
3. restaurant
4. orchard

formal/material:

5. controlled climate:  
humidity and temperature
6. separation from exterior

### Wilderness

characteristics

savage,  
inhospitable,  
barren,  
desolate,  
waste

program:

program-less,  
forest - inhospitable





ROMANTIC WILDERNESS

By the eighteenth century, the perception of the previously feared wilderness had evolved into a sacred and awe-inspiring terror. Wilderness became a supernatural landscape, where one was most likely to find themselves face-to-face with the divine. Through the sublime doctrine of theorists such as Edmond Burke, Immanuel Kant, and William Gilpin, wilderness was celebrated for its sacred, powerful and supernatural qualities. America’s first national parks; Yosemite, Yellowstone, Ranier, Grand Canyon, and Zion; all express the value system of the Romantics of which they judged wilderness.

Sublime

characteristics:  
sacred,  
powerful,  
terror,  
awe,  
supernatural,  
wild

program:  
5. canyons  
6. mountains  
7. framed views  
8. ruin-follies  
9. waterfall  
10. rainbows





AMERICAN WILDERNESS

The westward expansion of American colonization relied on an attitude of a necessary conquering of the wilderness. The Old World attitudes still had resonance in the frontier, and settlers did what they could to clear the wilderness. The land was savage, whose transformation represented the dawn of America.

On the other hand, a second source of wilderness enthusiasm emerged in the American frontier. An independent and free America recognised a wilderness that was different than any landscape Europe had seen that was truly 'American'. This image became a source of national identity.

“But even as it came to embody the awesome power of the sublime, wilderness was also being tamed—not just by those who were building settlements in its midst but also by those who most celebrated its inhuman beauty. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the terrible awe that Wordsworth and Thoreau regarded as the appropriately pious stance to adopt in the presence of their mountaintop God was giving way to a much more comfortable, almost sentimental demeanor. As more and more tourists sought out the wilderness as a spectacle to be looked at and enjoyed for its great beauty, the sublime in effect became domesticated.”<sup>1</sup>

Frontier

savage  
endless  
in the way  
to be civilized

free  
wild  
national

program:  
10. farms  
11. gardening  
12. pasture  
13. temple

1 William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”



## MYTH OF THE FRONTIER

“Among the core elements of the frontier myth was the powerful sense among certain groups of Americans that wilderness was the last bastion of rugged individualism... This nostalgia for a passing frontier way of life inevitably implied ambivalence, if not downright hostility, toward modernity and all that it represented. If one saw the wild lands of the frontier as freer, truer, and more natural than other, more modern places, then one was also inclined to see the cities and factories of urbanindustrial civilization as confining, false, and artificial.”<sup>2</sup>

### Primitivism

for the wealthy  
for visiting  
recreation  
tourism  
escape  
manly

program:

- 14. country club
- 15. tennis courts
- 14. whiskey lounge
- 15. gift shop
- 16. stadium



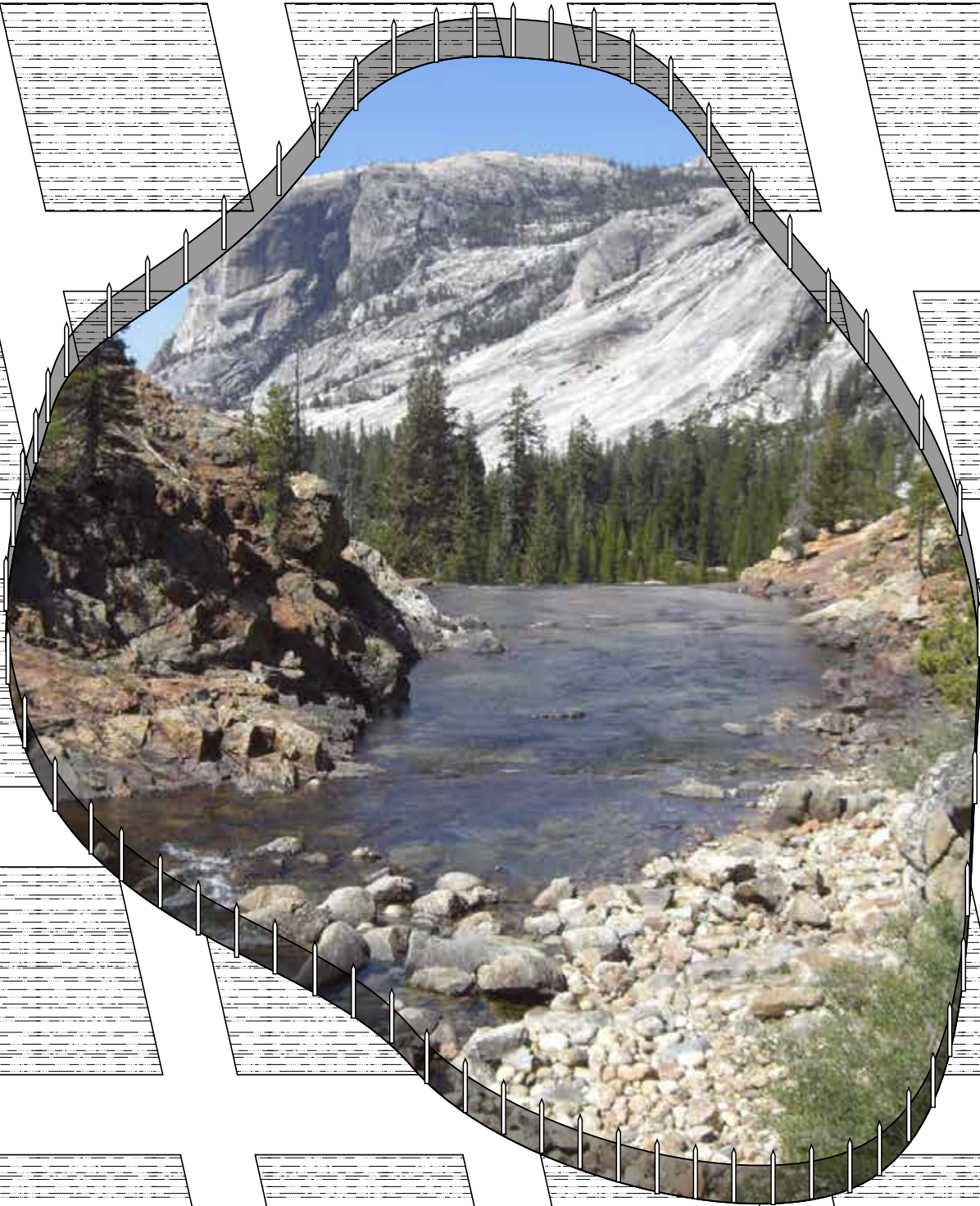


PRESERVATION

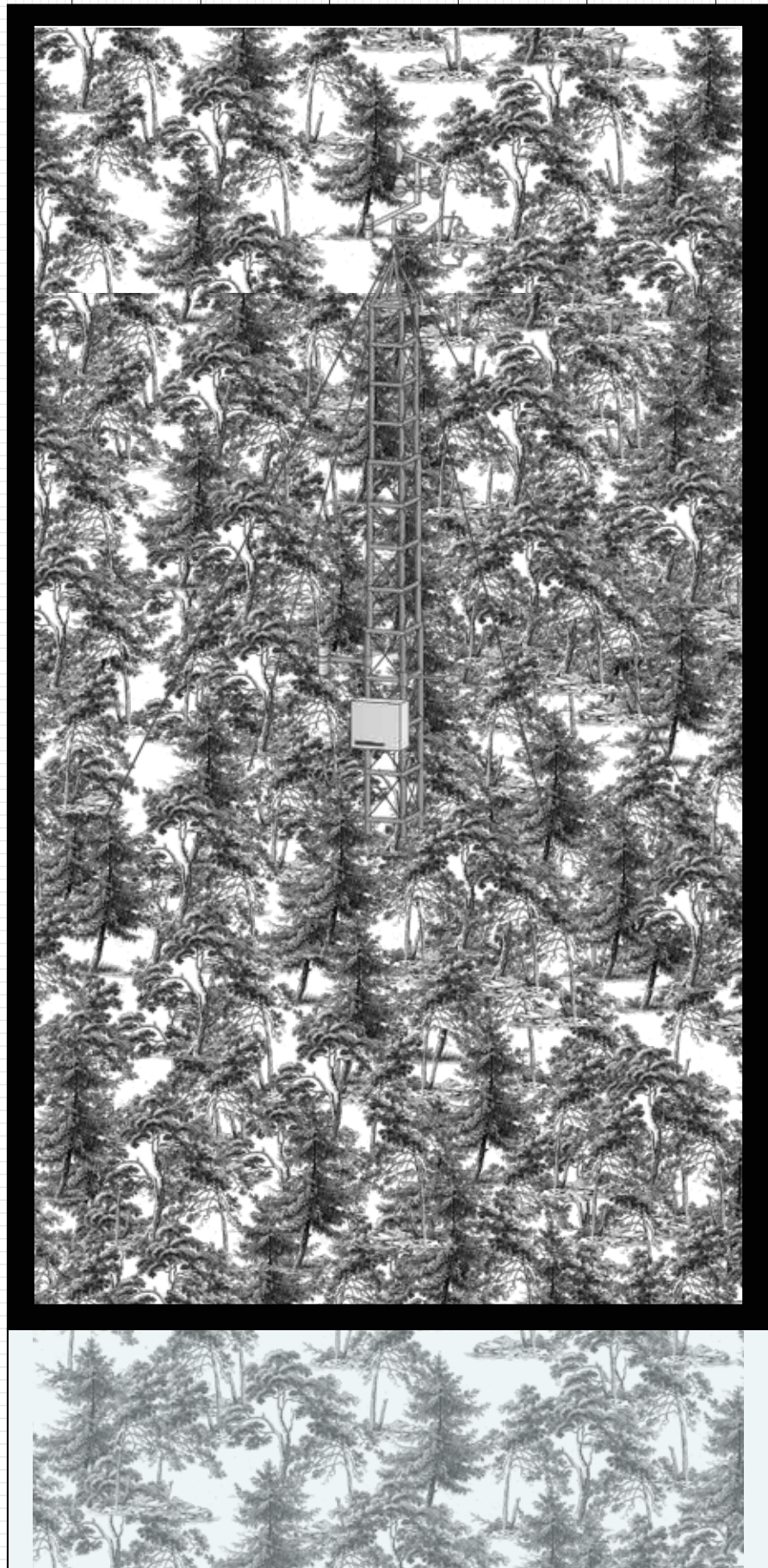
“in the myth of the vanishing frontier lay the seeds  
of wilderness preservation in the United States, for if wild land had been so crucial in the making  
of the nation, then surely one must save its last remnants as monuments to the American past  
—and as an insurance policy to protect its future.”<sup>3</sup>

valuable  
resource  
exhaustable

ecology management  
stewardship  
nature reserves  
regulation







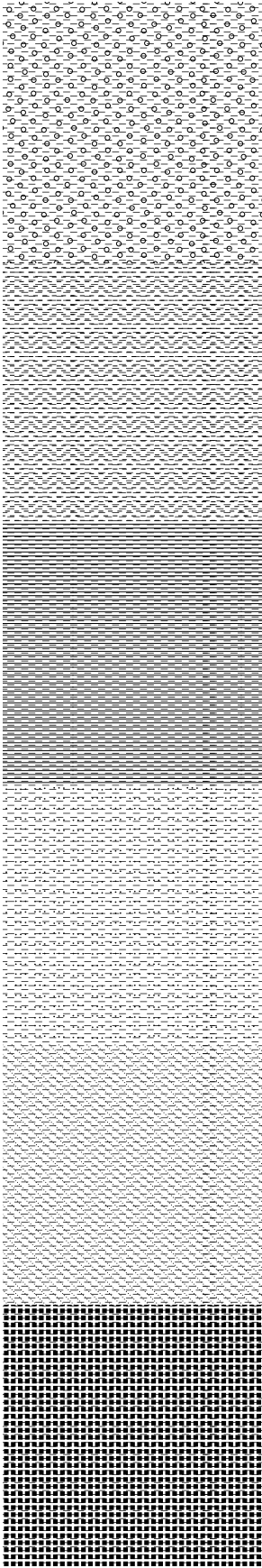
## WILD WILDERNESS

“Wild, then, is not synonymous with pristine or virgin. Rather, it is the state wherein those evolutionary processes of an area’s genesis—free from human purpose, utility, or design—are allowed to shape its future. Thus, not requiring the absence of all human effect, wildness can persist in environments that have been altered or continue to be influenced by external human factors such as climate change—as long as we refrain from interfering with nature’s autonomous response.”

- Robert Kaye<sup>4</sup>

### Wildness

alone to evolve



Old Roots

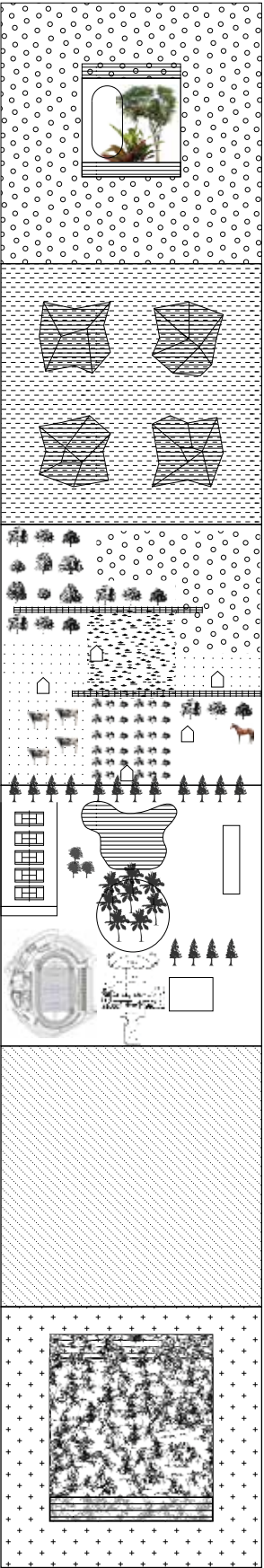
Romantic Wilderness

American Wilderness

Myth of the Frontier

Preservation

Wild Wilderness



Old Roots

- 1. botanical garden
- 2. resting places
- 3. restaurant
- 4. orchard
- 5. petting zoo

Romantic Wilderness

- 5. inverted mountain
- 6. ruin-follics, temple
- 7. expansive views

American Wilderness

- 7. temple
- 8. bathrooms
- 9. work barns (cabins)
- 10. stump forest
- 11. gardening
- 12. pasture

Myth of the Frontier

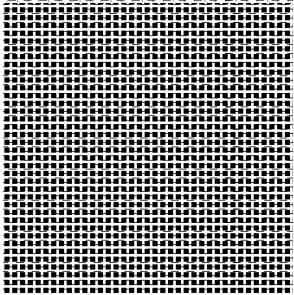
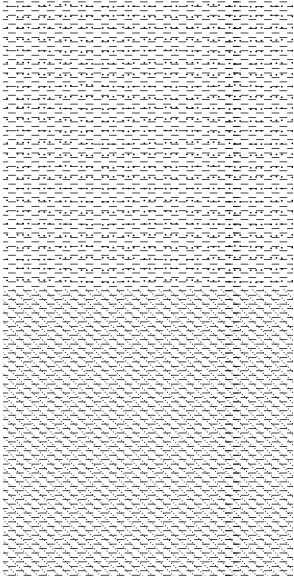
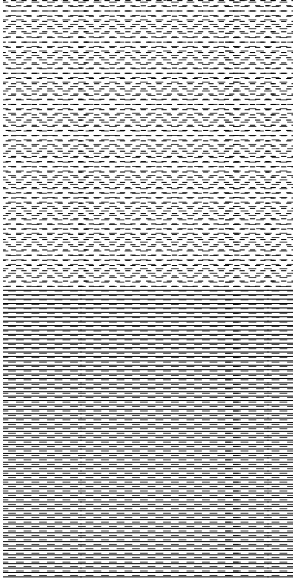
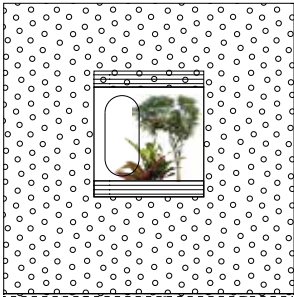
- 10. country club
- 11. tennis courts
- 12. stadium
- 13. whiskey lounge
- 14. gift shop

Preservation

- 16. monitoring station
- 17. education

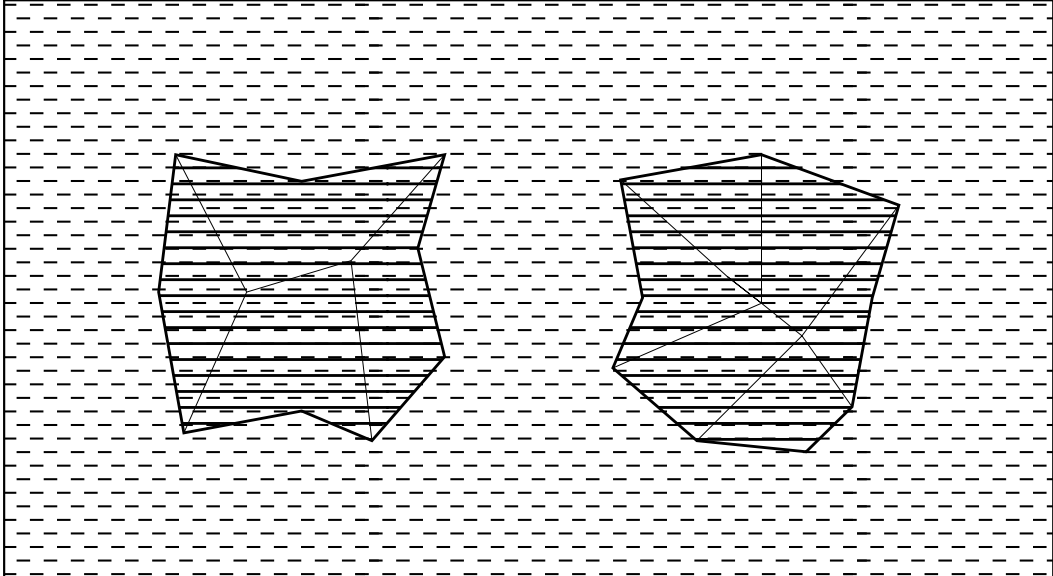
Wild Wilderness

- abandoned wilderness
- film towers
- wall

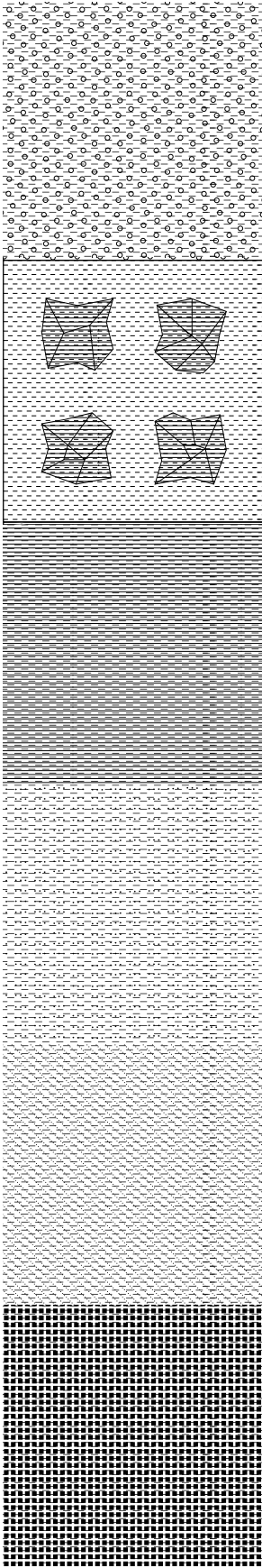


Old Roots

- 1. botanical garden
- 2. resting places
- 3. restaurant
- 4. orchard
- 5. petting zoo

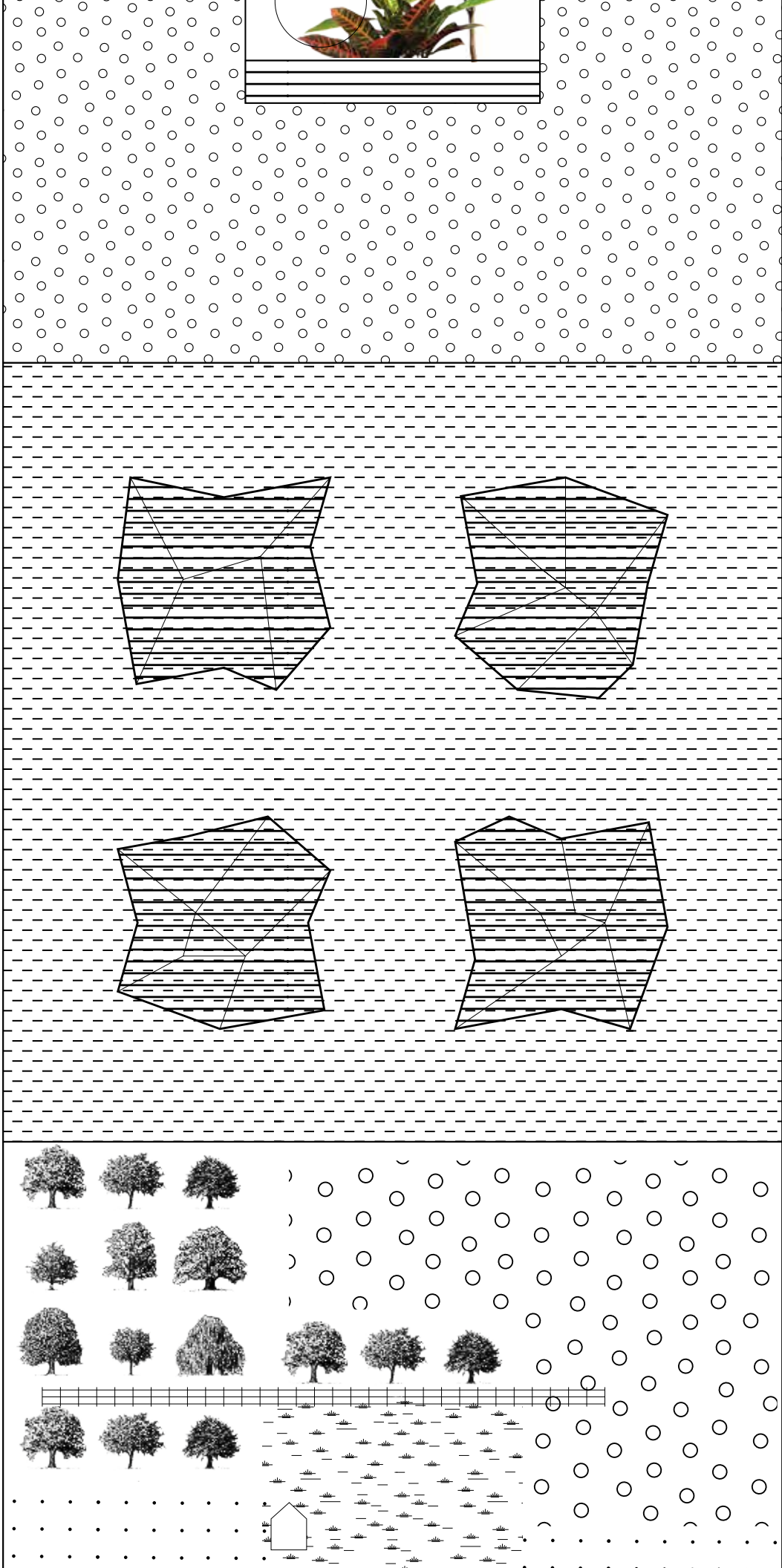


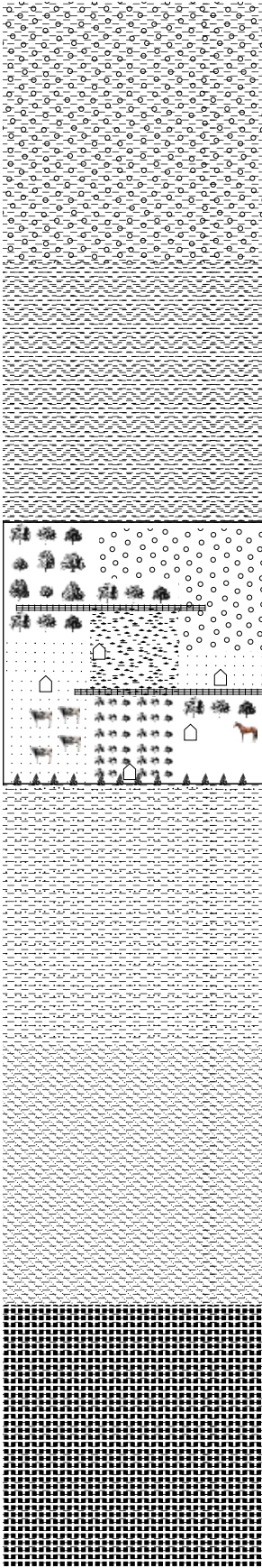




Romantic Wilderness

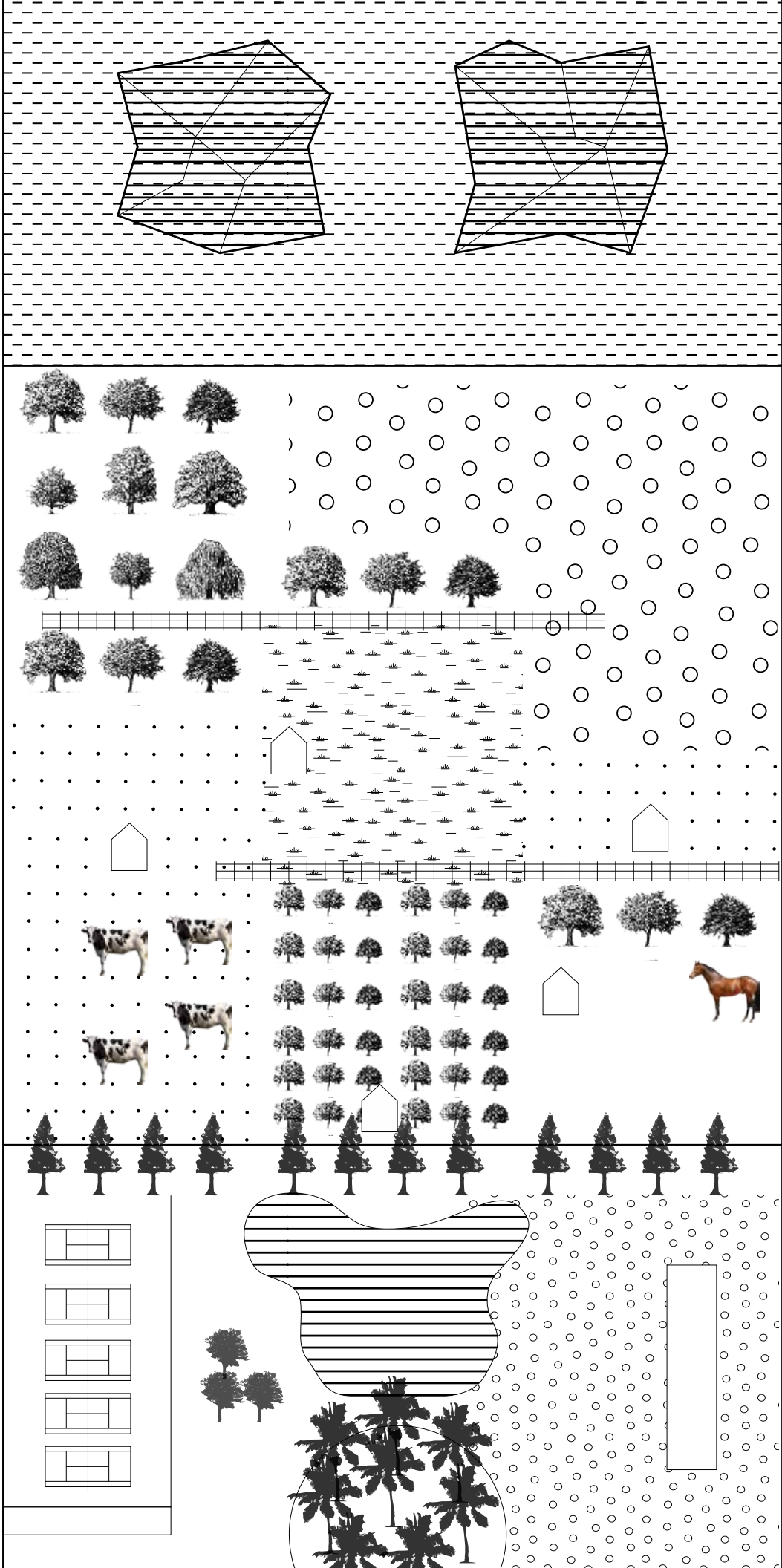
- 5. inverted mountain
- 6. ruin-follies, temple
- 7. expansive views

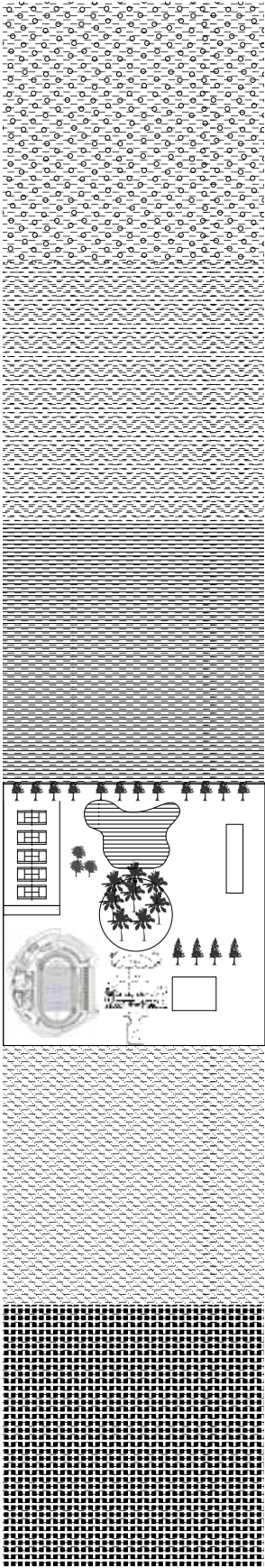




American Wilderness

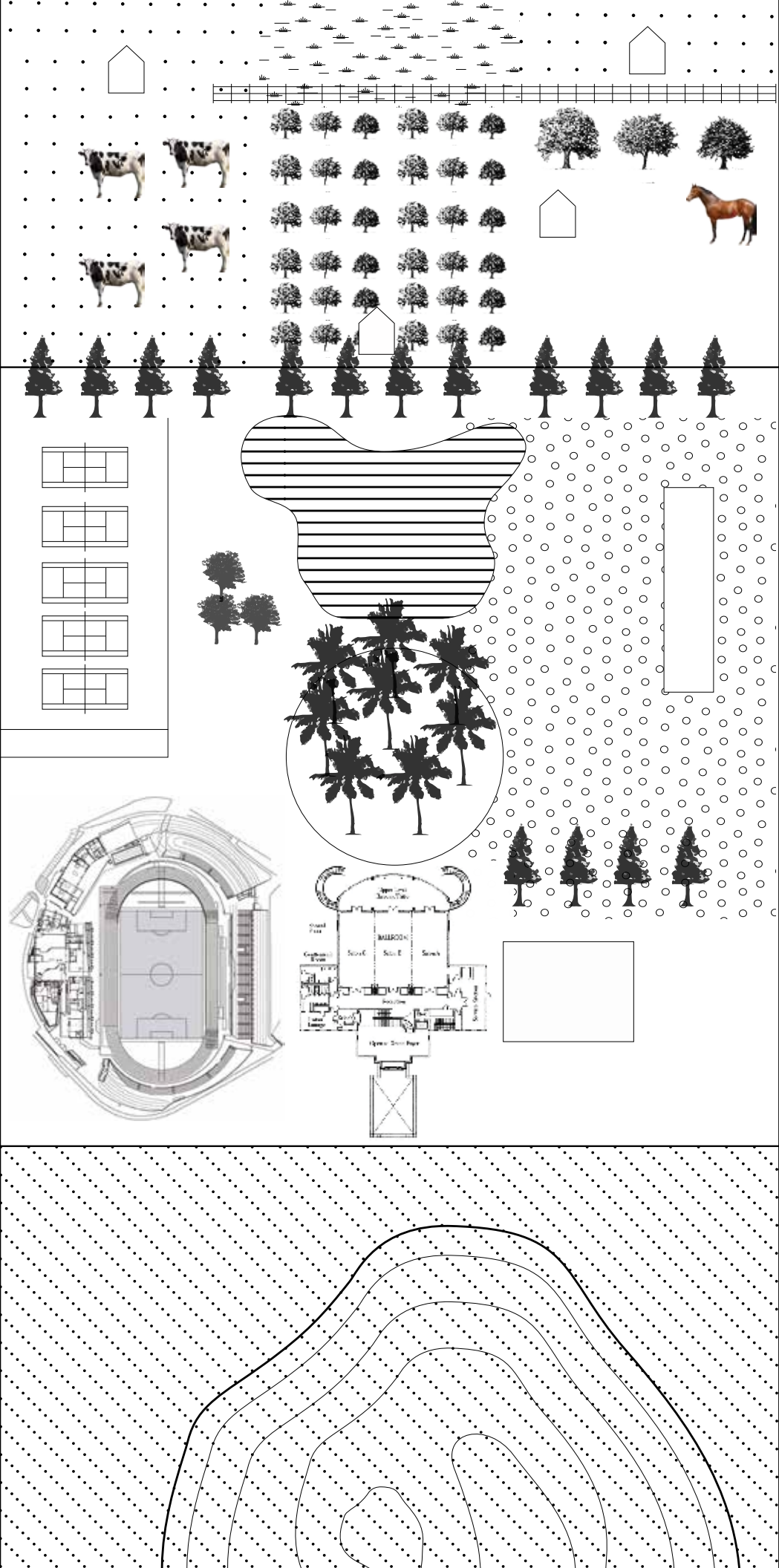
- 7. temple
- 8. bathrooms
- 9. work barns (cabins)
- 10. stump forest
- 11. gardening
- 12. pasture



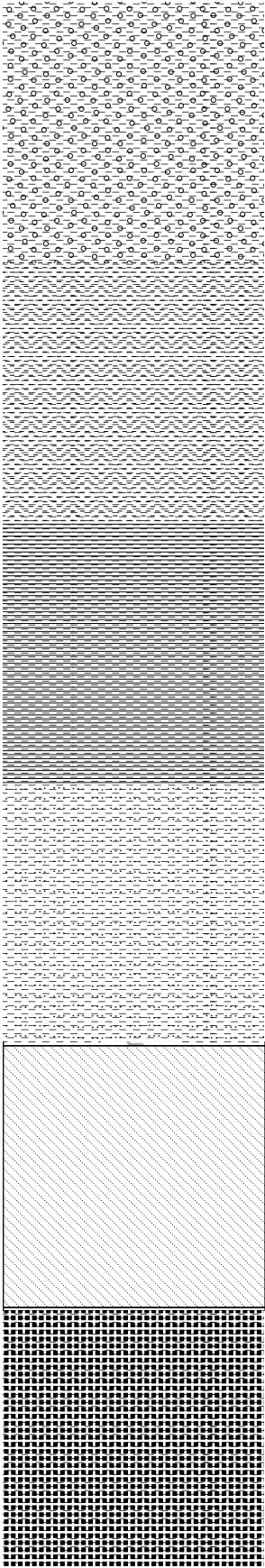


Myth of the Frontier

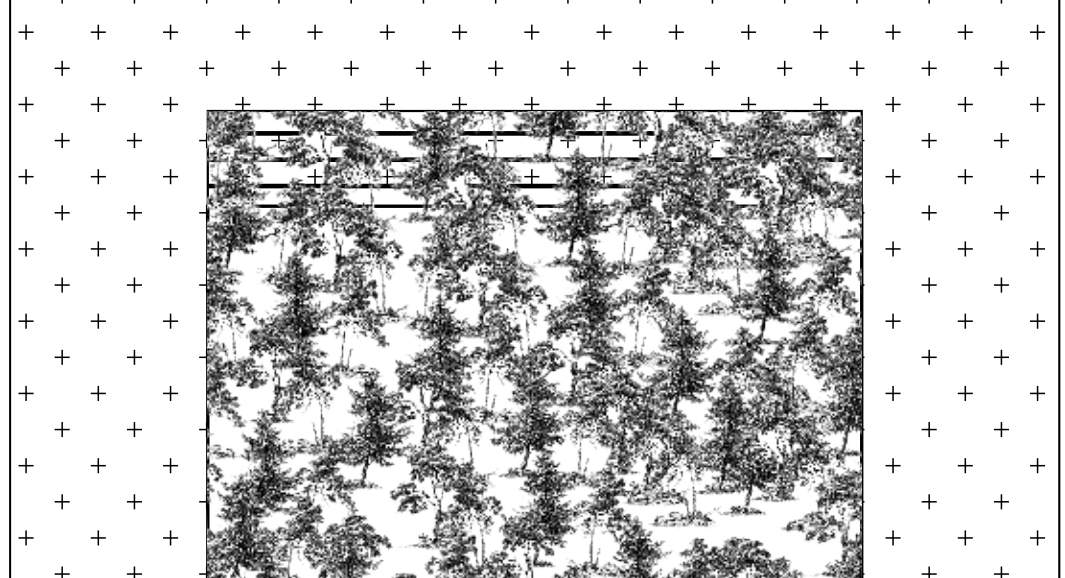
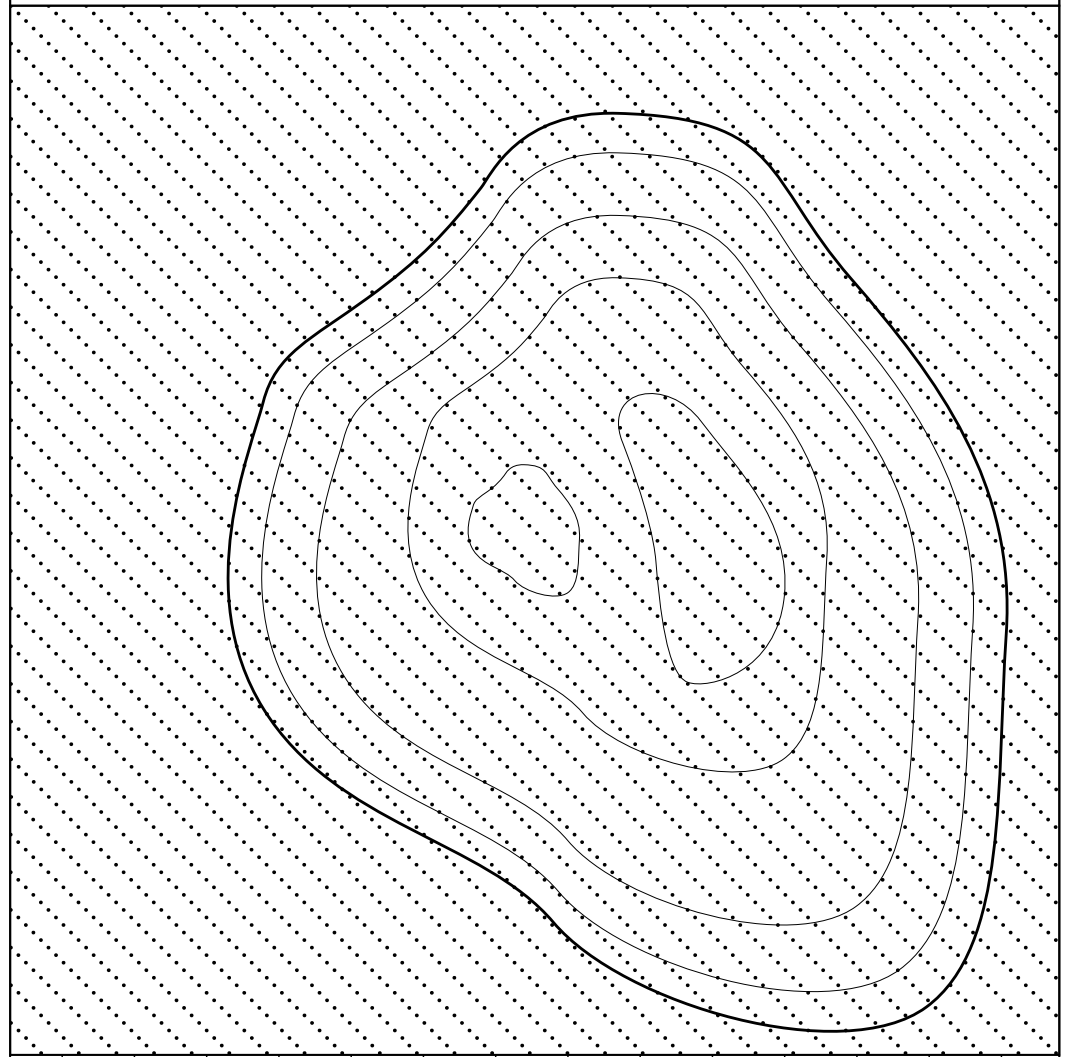
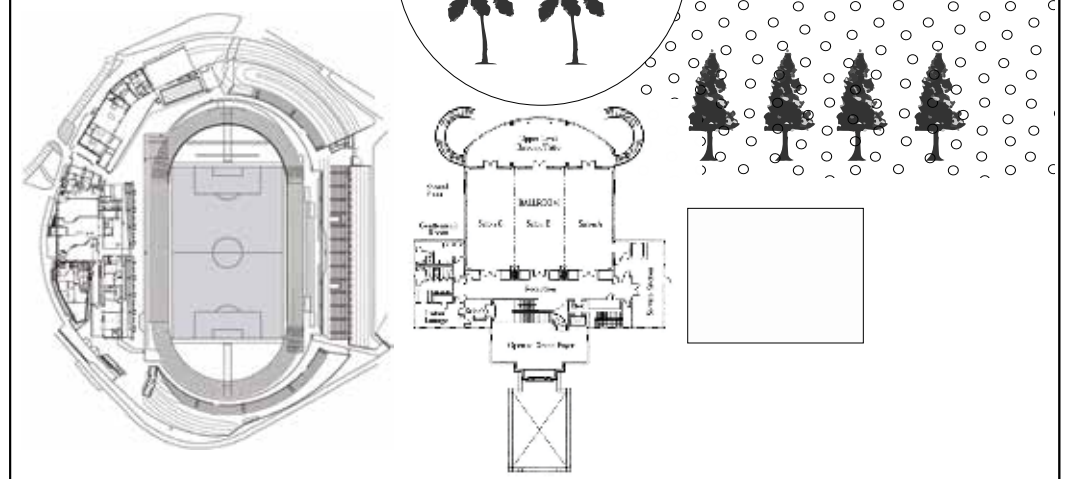
- 10. country club
- 11. tennis courts
- 12. stadium
- 13. whiskey lounge
- 14. gift shop

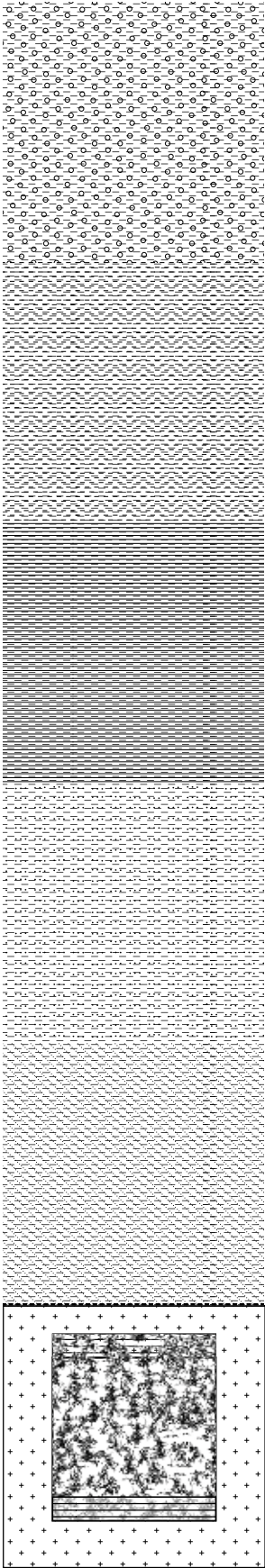






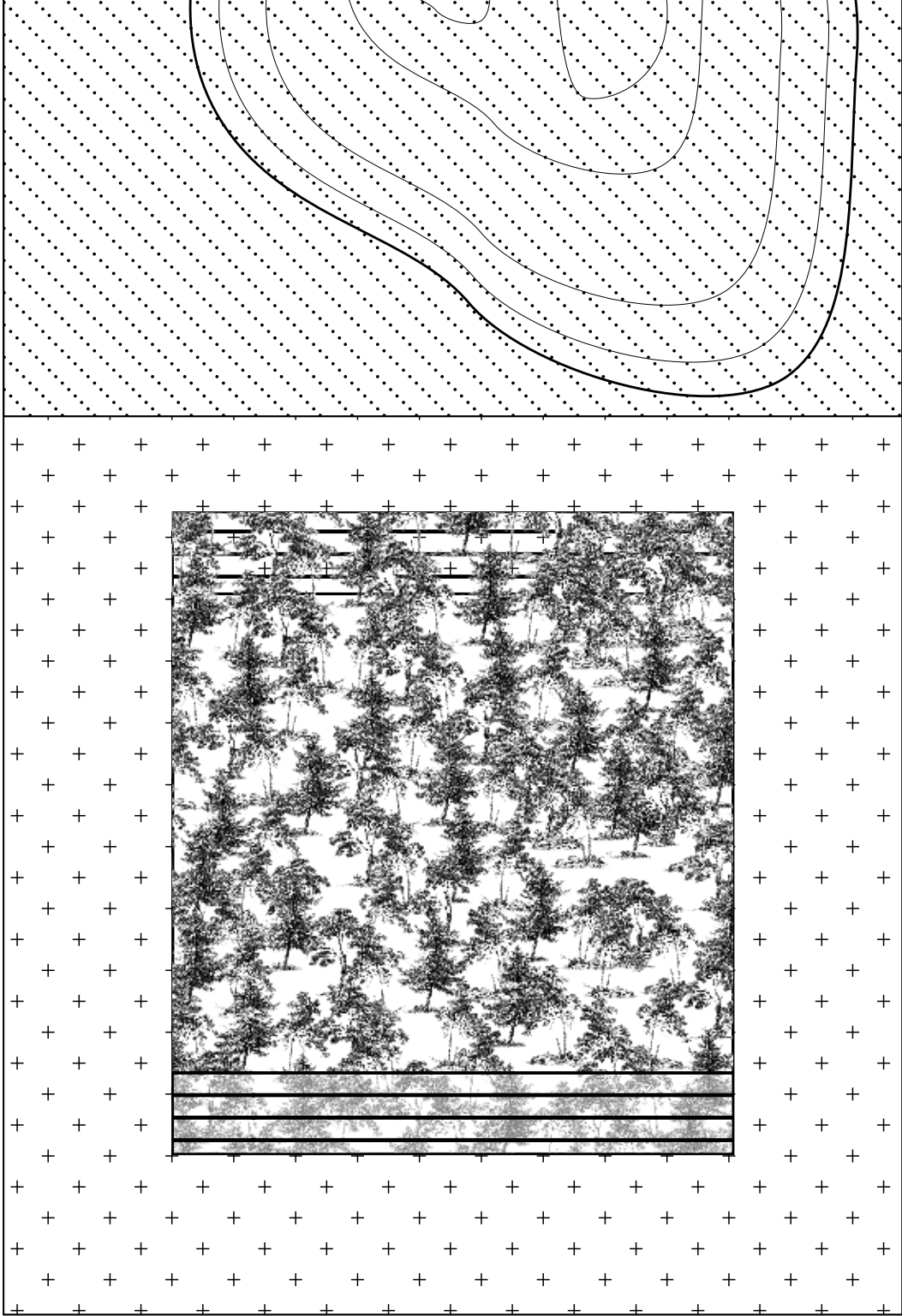
Preservation  
16. monitoring station  
17. education





Wild Wilderness

- abandoned wilderness
- film towers
- wall



RESEARCH



History of the Wilderness Idea



Early example of a natural history cabinet of curiosities.

Cabinet of Curiosities

"The *Kunstkammer* was regarded as a microcosm or theater of the world, and a memory theater. The *Kunstkammer* conveyed symbolically the patron's control of the world through its indoor, microscopic reproduction."

OLD ROOTS

Display Technique

Human - Wilderness Relationship



"Paradise Lost" John Milton

"waste"  
"barren"  
"desolate"  
"savage"

Jean-Jacques Rousseau  
Theory of Natural Human



1757, Edmond Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*



Charles Paele's Museum of natural specimens

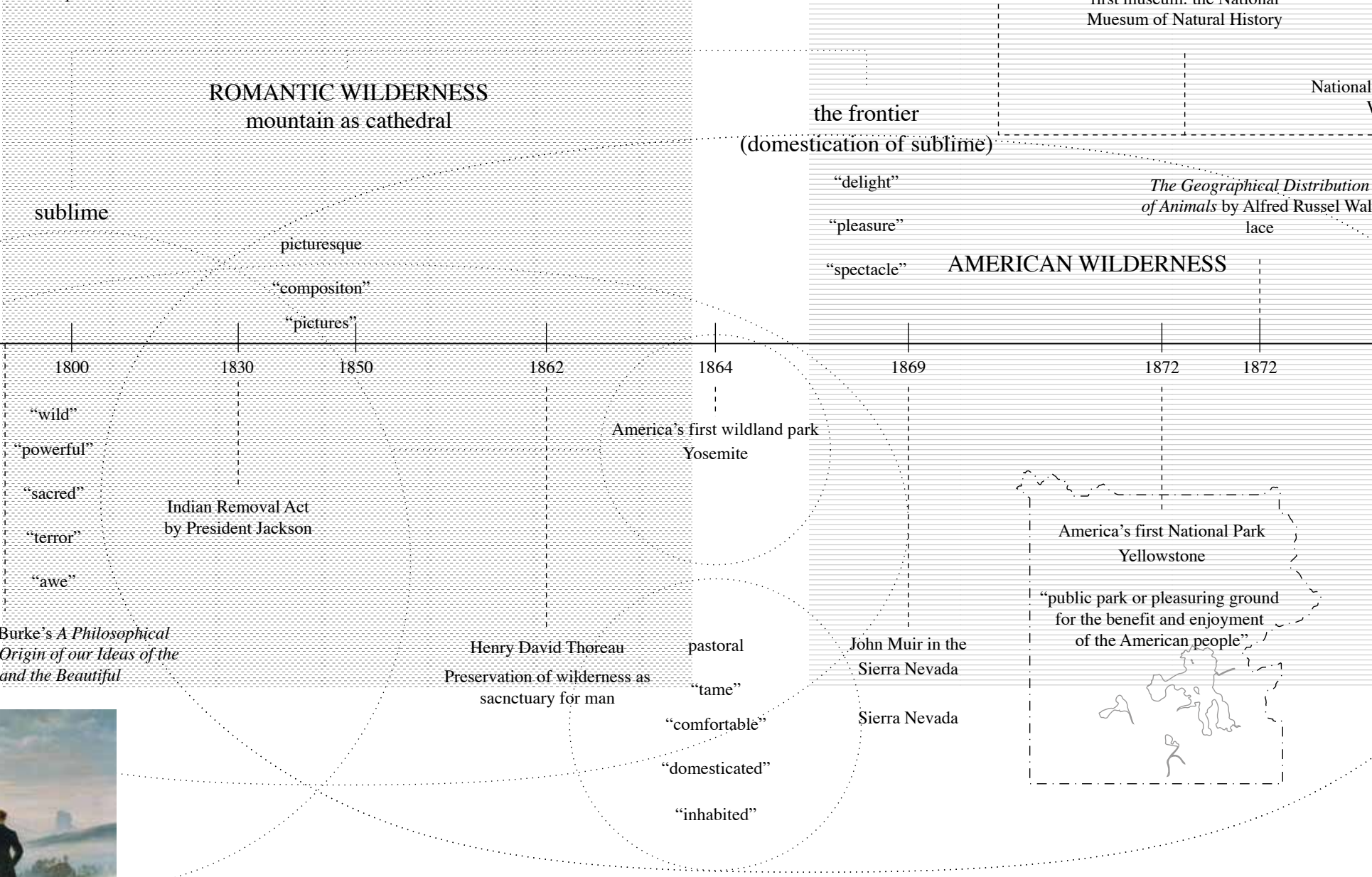


New Cultural Buildings:  
Smithsonian in DC and British Museum in London



Bone Hall opens the Smithsonian's first museum: the National Muesum of Natural History

National W





Smithsonian's  
National  
History



"Tiergeographische  
Gruppen"  
First habitat diorama opens  
at the Grand Ducal Museum in  
Darmstadt, Germany



National Zoological Park opens,  
Washington, DC

Geographical Distribution  
by Alfred Russel Wal-  
lace

SS

1872 1881 1889 1893 1906 1909 1912



nal Park

ng ground  
joyment  
people"

Owen Wister  
*The Virginian*

Theodore Roosevelt  
"manly qualities"

elite tourism

wilderness as a commodity

Frederick Jackson Turner  
on national renewal:

"The frontier is gone and with its  
going has closed the first period of

### MYTH OF THE FRONTIER

primitivism

"beauty"

"free"

"masculine"

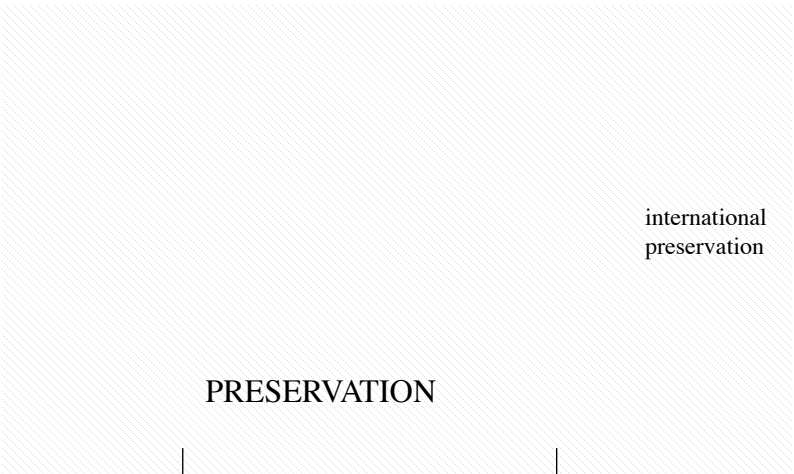
"safe"

"the myth of the vanishing frontier lay the seeds of wilderness preservation in  
the United States, for if wild land had been so crucial in the making of the  
nation, then surely one must save its last remnants as monuments to the American  
past — and as an insurance policy to protect its future."- William Cronon



RAINIER  
NATIONAL PARK

1. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" William Cronon
2. Taxidermist at work on Smithsonian-Roosevelt African Expedition Specimens, with the East African Lions in the foreground, c. 1911. Image from Smithsonian Institution Archives
3. The African Diorama at Darmstadt. Reproduction of a photograph in the Koch archives at Darmstadt. from Julia Voss & Sahotra Sarkar (2003) Depictions as surrogates for places: From Wallace's biogeography to Koch's dioramas, Philosophy & Geography
4. Satan in Eden 1866 (From Paradise Lost by John Milton) ~ Gustave Doré
5. Caspar David Friedrich, Wanderer above the Sea of Fog, 1817, Kunsthalle Hamburg. Romantic artists during the 19th century used the epic of nature as an expression of the sublime
6. Francesaco Fiorani, reviewing Bredecamp 1995 in Renaissance Quarterly 51.1 (Spring 1998:268-270) p 268.
7. Enraving from Ferrante Imperato, Dell'Historia Naturale (Naples 1599)
8. The United States Wilderdess Act, 1964. <http://wilderness.nps.gov/document/wildernessAct.pdf>



### PRESERVATION

1949

1964

Aldo Leopold writes  
*The Land Ethic*

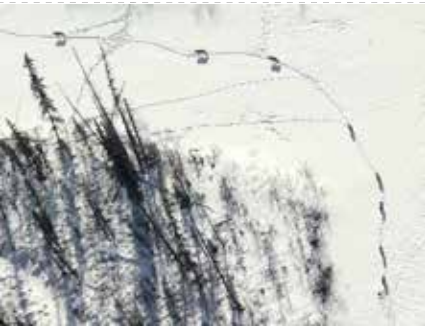


Wilderness Act, USA  
"an area where the earth and its  
community of life are  
**untrammeled** by man, where man  
himself is a **visitor** who does not  
remain"

### WILD WILDERNESS

anthropocene

Bill McKibben's 1989 pronouncement of "The End of Nature,"





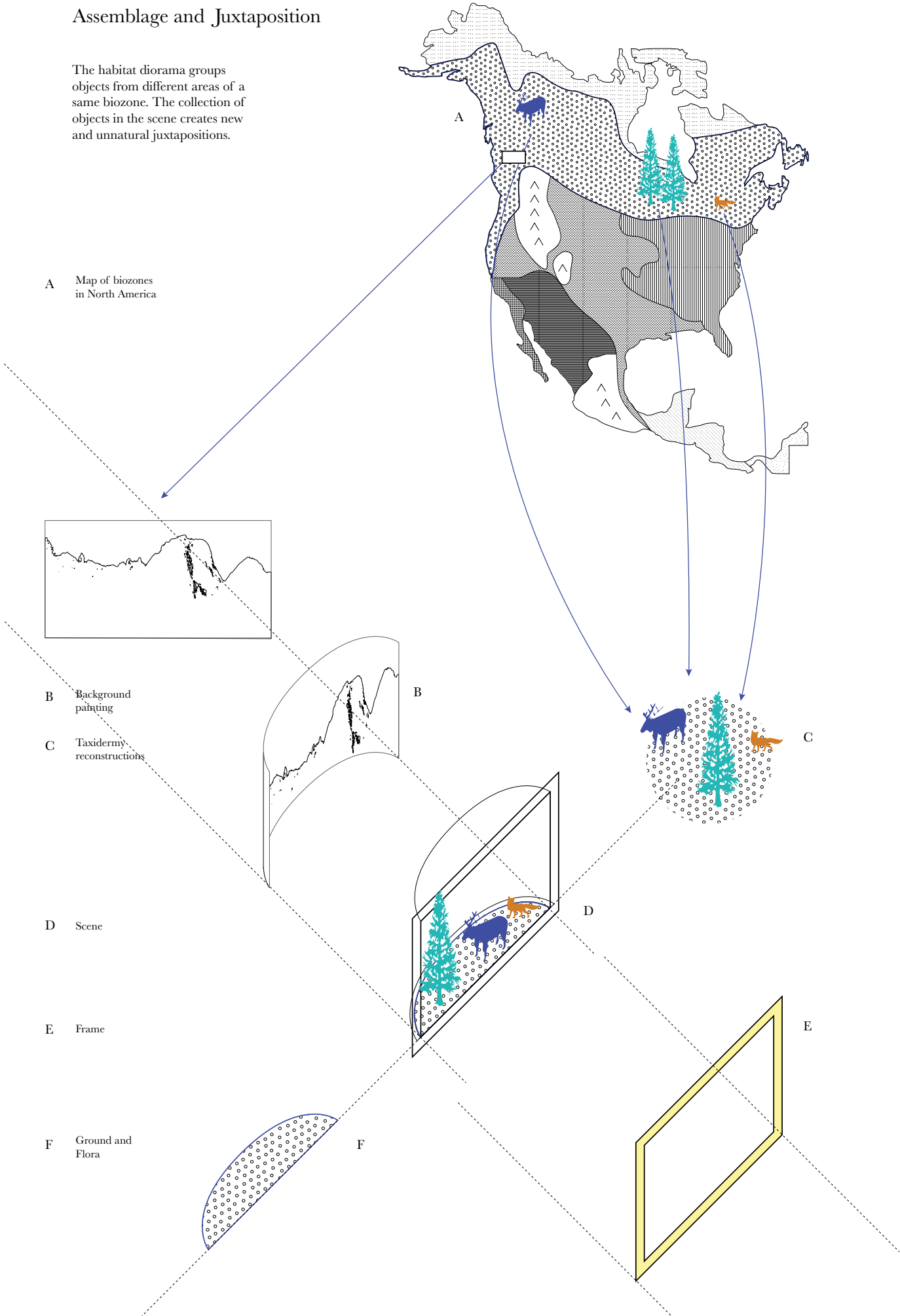
The Habitat Diorama



James Perry Wilson in Mule Deer diorama at the American Museum of Natural History, 1943.  
Photograph by Thanos Johnson

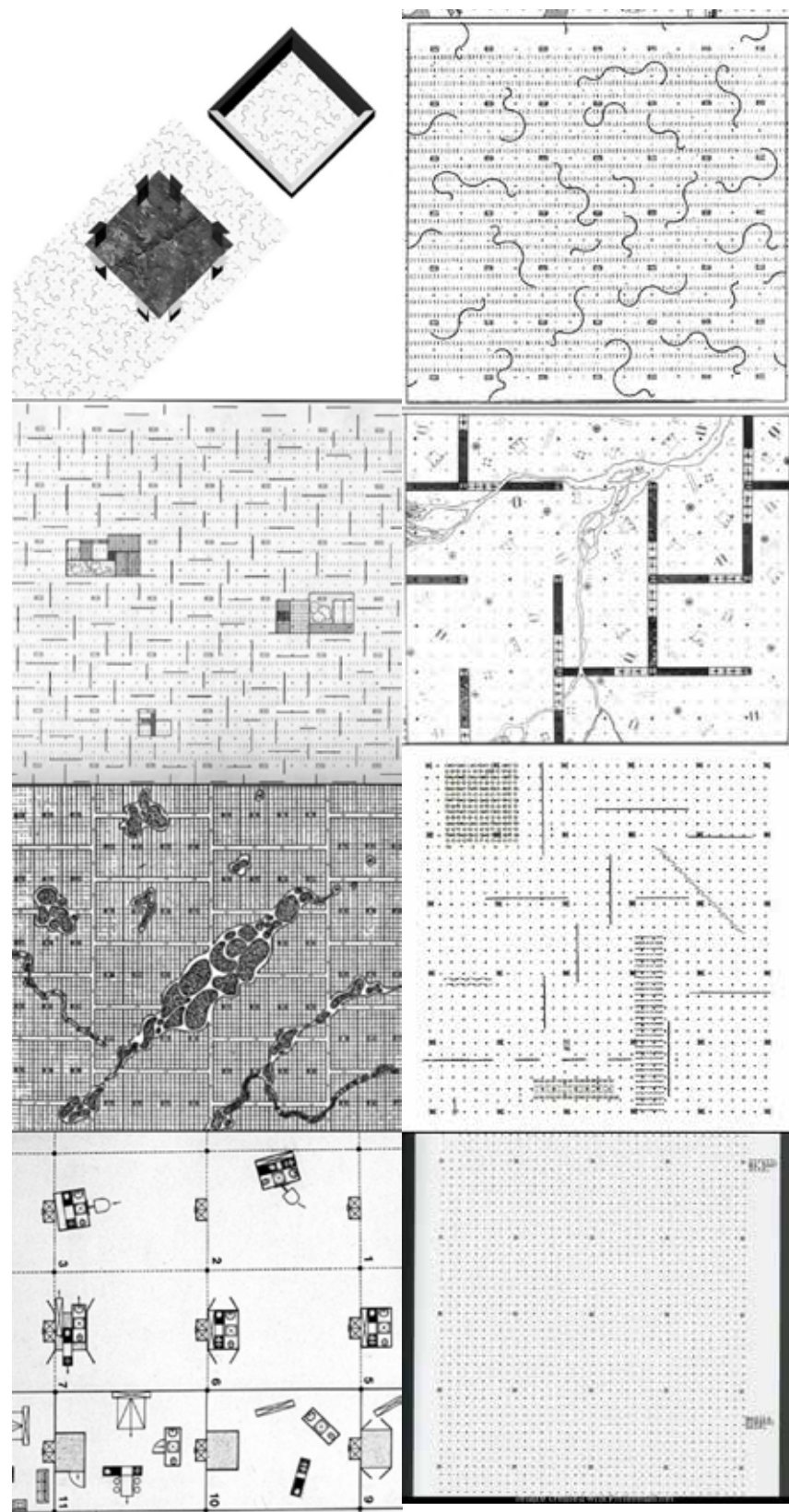
Assemblage and Juxtaposition

The habitat diorama groups objects from different areas of a same biozone. The collection of objects in the scene creates new and unnatural juxtapositions.



## PRECEDENTS





Images from No-Stop City  
Archizoom

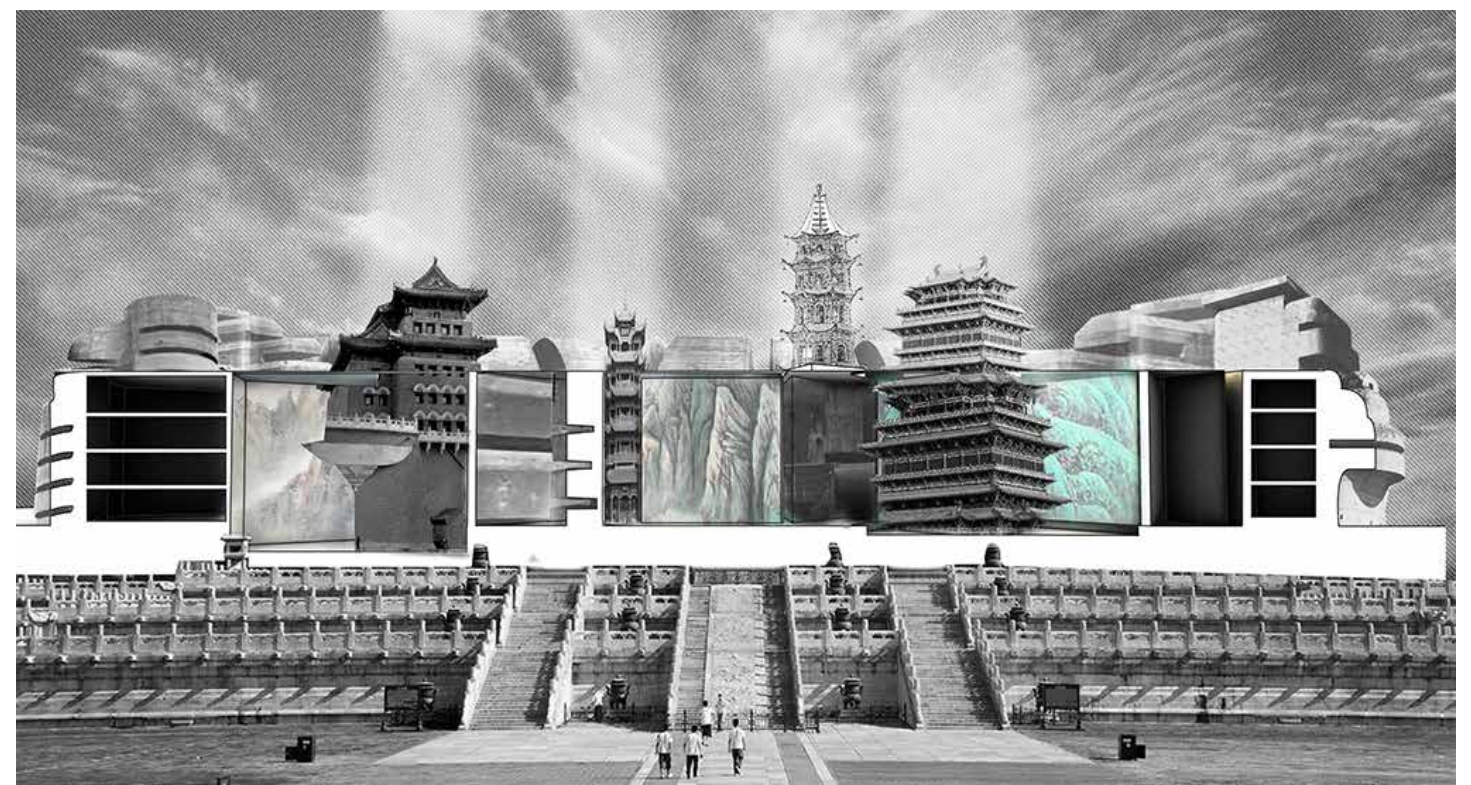
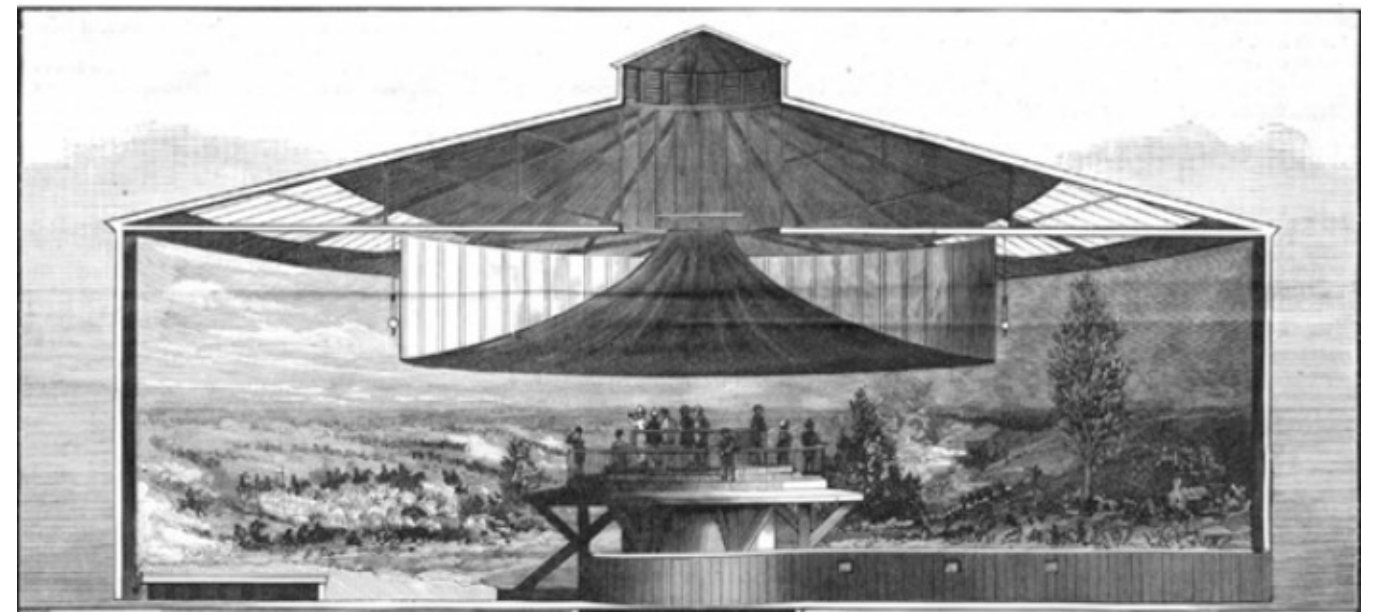


Image from Landscape Series  
Jimenez Lai

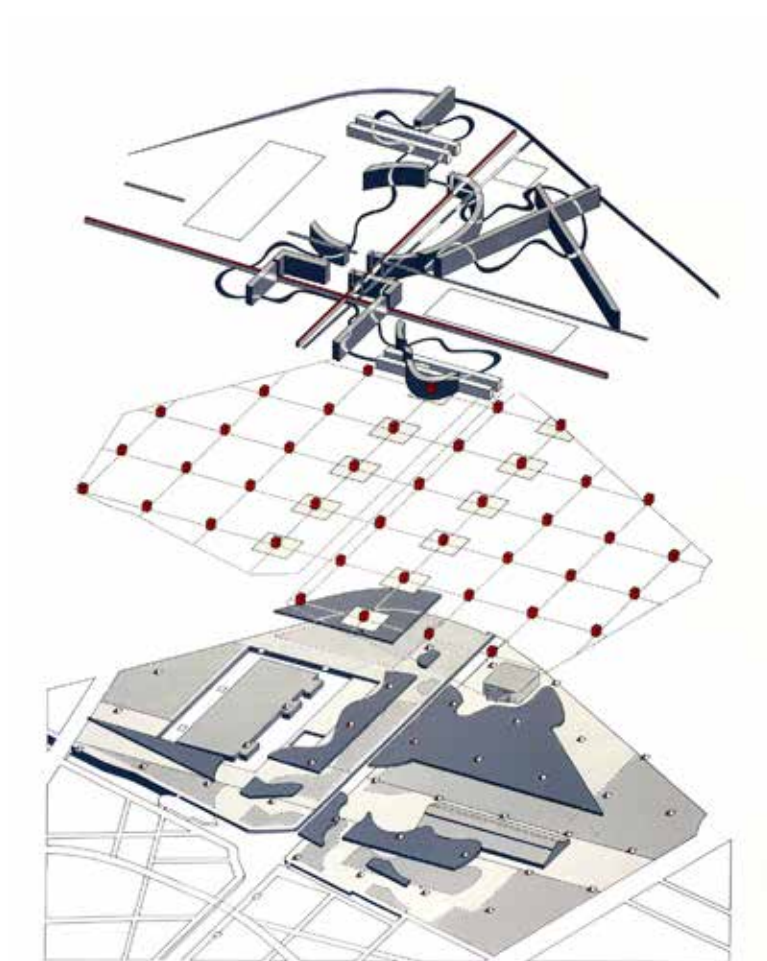




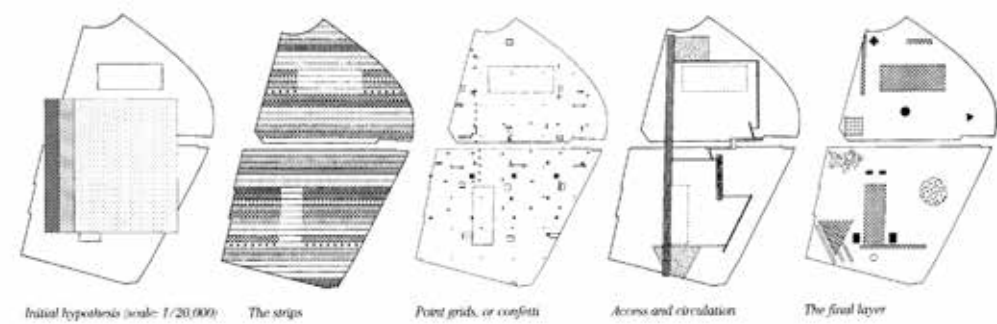
Tank scene for *A Guy Named Joe* (1944), MGM studio lot. [via Matte Shot]  
<https://placesjournal.org/article/turning-on-the-fantasy-fountain/>



The Gettysburg Panorama.  
 Illustration from *Scientific America* (1886).



Parc de La Villette, Paris, 1983.  
Bernard Tschumi



Competition drawings for Parc de La Villette,  
1983.  
OMA/Rem Koolhaas

(SITE)\*

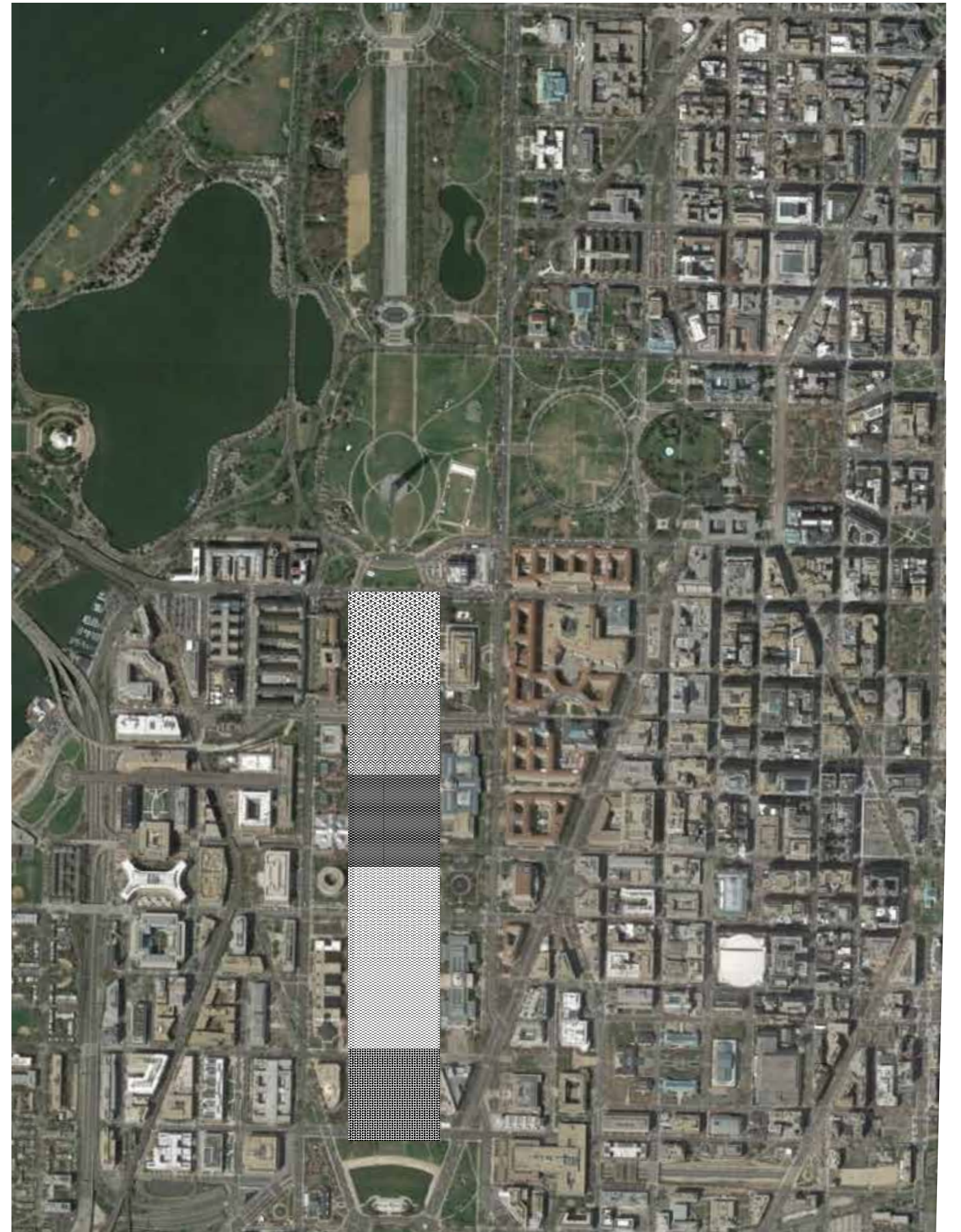
\*early options based on urban setting, scale, proximity to natural history museum  
and cultural centers, and open greenspace



Central Park, NYC



National Mall, Washington, D.C.





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The history of wilderness is the history of an idea. A missing element of the natural history museum is the human attitude within which nature is captured and displayed. This project wants to put the historical displays of the museum within a context by making an addition to the natural history museum that archives the historical attitudes, experiences and perceptions towards wilderness.

A current and common social understanding of wilderness can be at least partially attributed to the Wilderness Act of 1964, which determines wilderness as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain”. However, it is now known that there is no such place that is unaffected by human beings in our globalized world – even the most pristine parklands are infiltrated with electromagnetic waves and subject to global warming.

Wilderness, since the conception of the term, is always in opposition to human settlement and control. Wilderness doesn't exist because it is a socially constructed idea that creates a dichotomy within nature, separating humans from the places or processes that are outside of control. Wilderness is an idea because it is an anthropogenic attitude towards the world, and as these attitudes have changed throughout history, the perception of wilderness has evolved as a result. Critically assessing the historical techniques of display, the new wilderness museum is designed to frame and recreate American paradigms of wilderness.



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